



Feedback From RDA Survey is Beneficial

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, November 30, 2009

A couple of weeks ago I put together my own web based Redevelopment Budget survey. I shared financial information in bullet point form in the introduction and then gave information throughout the survey. In some cases I would state the dollar amount given to a particular program and then ask a question. More than 600 people completed the survey, which required that each question be answered. The survey could not be taken twice.

As with most issues that involve money, the feedback to my survey was mixed. I had a person who refused to even participate because they didn't like how I set up the survey. Others lauded my courage to share data and seek their input. They felt I was taking a risk to allow residents to share their concerns.

Web surveys are not necessarily scientific surveys, since web surveys allow anyone to participate. As we know, a true scientific survey controls and limits who is surveyed by gender, age, race, income level, voter registration and geographic location of the respondent. Scientific surveys can cost about \$40,000 for 1,000 people.

Viewpoints are subjective. Whereas one person may view a question as biased another may view it as objective. However, the most important part of a survey question is that the data be factual. In my survey, there were approximately 10 comments out of over 600 people who completed the survey who felt that particular survey questions were biased. For example, one person told me that I was "leading" the survey because I said that San Jose RDA has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on 18,000 units of affordable housing. I shared that this is information is factual and not leading.

My survey shared, in synopsis form, how much money has been spent on various issues. Many people did not realize that San Jose is the leader in affordable housing. Some respondents shared that they are very pleased with the Strong Neighborhood Initiative (SNI). While others, agreeing with affordable housing and SNI, felt that that we should spend money on economic development this next fiscal year.

My survey allowed those who chose to participate an outlet to share concerns, recommendations and rank their priorities for RDA monies.

As I have said, there were a few participants who felt the survey was biased; however, when I did a cross tabulation all but one of them chose Affordable Housing or SNI as more important than Economic Development. Cross tabulation also showed most of these specific participants felt that we should not borrow money from the Housing Department to spend on Economic Development this year. In addition, most of these participants shared that it was okay to spend money on a small fraction of neighborhoods in San Jose even though there are neighborhood infrastructure needs citywide.

After reading comments and speaking with survey respondents, I would add more choices to future surveys. For example, when it comes to ranking priorities I would add two more options; "Save Money"—since some people would rather not spend—and "None of the Above."

The survey required that each question to be answered, identical to how a councilmember "must" vote. Many times the Council votes on an ordinance or budget that individual councilmembers may not agree with 100 percent, so sometimes council votes for a package of things that are a bit uncomfortable. It's the same feeling that some of the respondents felt when asked to make decisions regarding the survey.

Another item I would add in the future is a web link if available for additional information. For example, respondents did not necessarily know what specific improvements were proposed at St. James Park, Japantown, Civic Auditorium, etc. The RDA budget is available online, however specific information on the proposed improvements is not easily found.

Thank you to those of you who participated in the survey. I know it was not easy and may have caused you to feel conflicted. I appreciate your time to engage and share your viewpoints with me.

Some of the results:

- 69.5% out of 787 respondents felt that borrowing from the Housing Dept. this year for Economic Development was okay.
- 70.8% out of 763 respondents disagreed with spending RDA money for a small fraction of neighborhoods in San Jose versus overall.

- 79.4% out of 709 respondents felt that Economic Development should be number one priority of RDA money.
- 59.7% out of 709 respondents approved of the Convention Center expansion.
- 52.8% out of 709 respondents did not approve of RDA land banking for a Downtown Baseball stadium.
- [Here is a link to all the results, including 268 comments.](#)

Finally [here is a table from Mayor Reed's RDA Budget message](#) that shows how economic development is better for city tax revenues and ongoing jobs than affordable housing.

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